

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 TEL AV 02177 01 OF 02 211217 Z

15

ACTION NEA-12

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7716

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

USINT CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 2177

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IS

SUBJECT: ISRAELI UNCERTAINTY AS TO TRENDS IN MIDDLE EAST POLICY

SUMMARY: DESPITE CONTINUOUS AFFIRMATIVE TREATMENT OF MEIR VISIT TO WASHINGTON AND STATE OF US- ISRAELI RELATIONS IN ISRAELI MEDIA OVER PAST TWO WEEKS, DISCORDANT NOTE HAS OCCASIONALLY BEEN STRUCK ON QUESTION OF EXTENT OF US ASSURANCES ON ARMS SUPPLY AND ON PROSPECTS FOR WAVERING IN US INSISTENCE THAT CAIRO SHOULD MAKE NEXT MOVE TOWARD MIDDLE EAST ACCOMMODATION. MORE SERIOUS COMMENTARIES, HOWEVER, HAVE RISEN ABOVE THESE STANDARD ISRAELI UNCERTAINTIES AND, AFTER MORE OR LESS DISMISSING THEM, HAVE QUESTIONED WHETHER US HAS NOT IN FACT BECOME DEEPLY SKEPTICAL RECENTLY ABOUT CHANCES IN FORESEEABLE FUTURE FOR ANY MEANINGFUL MOVEMENT TOWARD MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT. RAISING OF THIS QUESTION, AND OBSERVATION THAT DEPARTURE OF SOVIETS FROM EGYPT HAS REMOVED HEAT FROM MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT FROM US VIEWPOINT, HAVE CONVEYED IMPLICATION THAT WASHINGTON IS NOT AS MUCH CONCERNED ABOUT MIDDLE EAST AS IT USED TO BE. EMBASSY SUSPECTS THIS NOTION MAY BE GAINING GROUND CURRENTLY IN ISRAEL AND THAT MANY ISRAELIS MAY BE UNCERTAIN WHAT TO MAKE OF IT.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 TEL AV 02177 01 OF 02 211217 Z

END SUMMARY.

1. WHILE STORIES IN ISRAELI MEDIA ON STATE OF US- ISRAELI RELATIONS FOLLOWING MEIR VISIT, SOME OF THEM APPARENTLY BACKGROUND BY GOI, HAVE CONTINUED TO EXPRESS SATISFACTION WITH OVERALL PICTURE, ELEMENT OF UNCERTAINTY AS TO LONGTERM PICTURE HAS CREPT IN. RELATED TO THIS HAS BEEN ZIGZAG IN MEDIA ON QUESTIONS A) WHETHER GOI REQUESTS FOR ARMS ASSISTANCE HAVE REALLY BEEN ANSWERED AFFIRMATIVELY BY US, AND B) WHETHER US WILL MOUNT DIPLOMATIC CAMPAIGN WITHIN NEXT FEW MONTHS TO PROMOTE MIDDLE EAST ACCOMMODATION OR WILL REMAIN INACTIVE TO END OF YEAR.
 2. DAY FOLLOWING PRIME MEIR'S MARCH 1 MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT, ISRAELI EDITORIALISTS HERALDED WARM ATMOSPHERE MEETING, IN WHICH THEY SAW TOTAL ASSURANCE THAT US MID EAST POLICY TO REMAIN UNCHANGED, NOTABLY, MAINTENANCE OF BALANCE OF FORCES AND FIRST PRIORITY FOR TALKS ON INTERIM CANAL AGREEMENT, WITH NEXT STEP UP TO CAIRO. COMMENTATORS ALSO HAILED MRS MEIR'S CORDIAL WELCOME IN DEPTS OF STATE AND DEFENSE. MARCH 4 AND 5 COMMENTARIES CONTINUED THESE THEMES AND ADDED THAT PRESIDENT HAD INFORMED MRS MEIR OF UNCOMPRO-MISING EGYPTIAN ATTITUDE REFLECTED BY ISMAIL. WASHINGTON WOULD NOW TAKE ITS TIME DIGESTING HUSSEIN, ISMAIL, AND MEIR VISITS AND WOULD NOT MOVE TOWARD HASTY DIPLOMACY, PRESS SAID. THAT US MIGHT NOT AUTOMATICALLY AGREE TO ALL DETAILS OF ISRAELI ARMS REQUESTS WAS UNIMPORTANT, IN VIEW OF PRESIDENT'S GENERAL ASSURANCE TO MRS MEIR THAT US SUPPORT WOULD CONTINUE.
 3. PRESS STATED MARCH 6 THAT US HAD AGREED ALMOST ENTIRELY TO ISRAELI ARMS REQUESTS AND THAT ISRAELI MISGIVINGS UNJUSTIFIED. ALSO, NO SIGNIFICANT US MID EAST DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY WAS TO BE EXPECTED IN NEAR FUTURE. US WOULD NOW CONCENTRATE ON IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH EGYPT, AND REAL TES FOR ISRAELI DIPLOMACY WOULD COME ONLY IF EGYPT AND USSR WERE TO CHANGE THEIR POSITION ON INTERIM AGREEMENT. MARCH 7 HAARETZ COMMENTARY ATTRIBUTED GREAT SUCCESS OF MEIR VISIT AND EXCELLENT STATE OF US- ISRAELI RELATIONS TO SEVERAL FACTORS: ISRAEL'S NOT WANTING ANY HELP OF US FORCES; CONVICTION THAT A STRONG ISRAEL DETERS NOT ONLY MIDDLE EAST WAR BUT ALSO SOVIET INVOLVEMENT IN ANY FIGHTING; AND CONCLUSION (AFTER SEPT 1970 JORDAN- SYRIAN CONFRONTATION) THAT ISRAEL'S STRENGTH ALSO
- CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 TEL AV 02177 01 OF 02 211217 Z

GUARDS US INTERESTS IN PRO- WESTERN ARAB STATES.

4. ELEMENT OF UNCERTAINTY FIRST EMERGED IN MEDIA MARCH 8, IN WAKE OF RESTON NYT ARTICLE PREDICTING INTENSIVE US DIPLOMACY RE MIDDLE EAST AND WHITE HOUSE SPOKESMAN'S REFERENCE TO FUTURE COORDINATION OF MIDDLE EAST ISSUES BY KISSINGER FOR BREZHNEV VISIT. CONFLICTING STORIES APPEARED ABOUT WHETHER PRESIDENT HAD PRESENTED SETTLEMENT PROPOSALS TO HUSSEIN, ISMAIL, AND MRS MEIR. SOME PAPERS NOW PREDICTED US MIDDLE EAST INITIATIVE AS EARLY AS APRIL, WHILE OTHERS EXPRESSED CONVICTION US WOULD REMAIN PASSIVE. AS FOR US ARMS ASSISTANCE, US WAS DESCRIBED AS PREPARED TO ACTIVATE AGREEMENT ON SUPPLYING PRODUCTION KNOW- HOW, BUT PROBABLY NOT TO BUY PARTS FROM ISRAEL TO HELP OFFSET ISRAEL'S LARGE ARMS EXPENDITURES IN US. PRESIDENT'S GENERALIZED REPLY TO MRS MEIR HAD NOW OPENED WAY TO NEGOTIATIONS ON THESE SUBJECTS; BUT BECAUSE OF US ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES, ISRAEL MIGHT NOT RECEIVE AS LARGE ARMS- PURCHASE CREDITS AS IN PAST YEARS.

5. THEME WAS CONTINUED MARCH 12 THAT ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT HAD ASSURED MRS MEIR OF CONTINUATION OF US SUPPORT, ECONOMIC AND ARMS DETAILS WERE STILL TO BE WORKED OUT. FOLLOWING MRS MEIR'S BRIEFING OF CABINET MARCH 13 ON HER US VISIT, PRESS NEXT DAY, PREDICTED THAT US PRESSURE FOR INTERIM SETTLEMENT WAS UNLIKELY BEFORE ISRAELI ELECTIONS IN AUTUMN, AND THAT MEANWHILE, CONCURRENT REVIEW BY WHITE HOUSE AND DEPT OF MIDDLE EAST SITUATION WOULD COMMENCE AT LEISURELY PACE. ALTHOUGH DETAILS ON ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE STILL TO BE SETTLED, SAPIR AND DAYAN WERE DESCRIBED AS EXPRESSING SATISFACTION.

6. BEECHER STORY IN NYT MARCH 14 ON US ARMS AID TO ISRAEL EVOKED FURTHER CONFLICTING REPORTS IN ISRAELI MEDIA ON DEGREE OF SPECIFICITY IN US ARMS ASSURANCES RECEIVED SO FAR, SOME CLAIMING THAT US AND ISRAELI OFFICIAL SOURCES HAD CONFIRMED BEECHER DETAILS AND OTHERS CLAIMING NO SUCH DETAILS SETTLED YET. SIMILARLY, PRESS SEIZED MARCH 16 ON WORD THAT EBAN WOULD BE VISITING US IN MAY TO SUGGEST THERE WOULD BE SERIOUS US MIDDLE EAST DIPLOMATIC CAMPAIGN ON VERGE OF INITIATION AT THAT TIME.

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 02177 02 OF 02 211206 Z

12
ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-09 H-02 INR-09 L-03

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AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 2177

7. IN LENGTHY MARCH 16 COMMENTARY, HARIF STATED MRS MEIR HAD TOLD CABINET THERE HAD BEEN NO HINT IN WASHINGTON OF US PRESSURE ON ISRAEL, ONLY REFERENCES BY PRESIDENT TO NEED FOR MOVEMENT ON MIDDLE EAST DEADLOCK. MRS MEIR HAD STRESSED IMPORTANCE OF PRESIDENT'S VIEWS BECAUSE GOOD US- ISRAELI RELATIONS DEPENDED ON HIM, HARIF ADDED; SHE HAD TOLD CABINET HER MEETINGS WITH ACTING SECRETARY AND SECRETARY RICHARDSON WERE "COOL," AND A PARTICIPANT ALLEGEDLY TOLD HARIF THAT THE TALK WITH SECRETARY RICHARDSON WAS IN FACT "HARD." THUS, US- ISRAELI RELATIONS WERE LARGELY PREDICTED ON UNDERSTANDING WITH WHITE HOUSE, MEANING GOI MUST LISTEN CLOSELY TO PRESIDENT'S CALL FOR MIDDLE EAST MOVEMENT. UNDERSTANDING EXISTED ON PRINCIPLES OF PEACE SETTLEMENT AND HOW TO ACHIEVE IT, ACCORDING TO HARIF, BUT NOT DETAILS.

8. HARIF CONTINUED THAT JERUSALEM WAS NOW ON TENTERHOOKS TO SEE OUTCOME OF NSC STUDY OF ISRAEL- EGYPT SETTLEMENT PICTURE. BUT ANY ANALOGY WITH USG MID EAST STUDY IN EARLY 1969 WAS UNFOUNDED BECAUSE CIRCUMSTANCES HAD CHANGED, ACCORDING TO HARIF. A) SOVIETS HAD PULLED OUT OF EGYPT, B) USSR SEEKING GLOBAL DETENTE WITH US, AND C) ISRAEL WAS MUCH CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 TEL AV 02177 02 OF 02 211206 Z

STRONGER. US THINKING ON EGYPT- ISRAEL SETTLEMENT HAD CHANGED, AND NO ONE IN WASHINGTON HAD EVEN MENTIONED ISSUES OF RAFAH JUNCTION OR LAND CORRIDOR TO SHARM EL- SHEIKH TO MRS MEIR, WHICH WAS NO ACCIDENT. KISSINGER'S NEW ASSESSMENT WOULD PROBABLY CONCLUDE THAT AS LONG AS EGYPT FAILED TO SHOW GENUINE READINESS FOR SETTLEMENT AND FOR SOME KIND OF NEGOTIATIONS, US SHOULD NOT CONDUCT DIPLOMATIC EXPERIMENTS, AND US DIPLOMACY INSTEAD SHOULD CONCENTRATE ON CHANGING CAIRO'S

ATTITUDE.

9. COMMENT: HARIF BY IMPLICATION COMES AROUND TO VIEWPOINT EXPRESSED ON EVE OF MRS MEIR' S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT BY MAARIV' S WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT SEGEV: SOVIET BY THEIR ACTIONS IN 1970 (STANDSTILL VIOLATIONS AND SYRIA- JORDAN CONFRONTATION) HAD AROUSED US SUSPICIONS AND CAUSED US TO SHIFT ITS MID EAST THINKING IN ISRAEL' S FAVOR; AND THEN SOVIETS BY THEIR 1972 DEPARTURE FROM EGYPT HAD REMOVED MAIN US INCENTIVE TO PRESS HARD FOR MIDDLE EAST ACCOMMODATION. WHITE HOUSE HAD LARGELY TAKEN CHARGE OF US MID EAST DIPLOMACY AT END OF 1971 AND HAD INJECTED REALISM INTO IT, MEANING, IN VIEW OF INCREASINGLY HARD EGYPTIAN LINE ON PARTIAL AND OVERALL SETTLEMENTS, US WOULD CONTINUE TO SEEK TO GIVE IMPRESSION OF MOVEMENT, BUT NOTHING IN FACT WOULD CHANGE.

10. THUS, DESPITE DAY TO DAY WORRY IN MEDIA ABOUT FIRMNESS OF US SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL, UNDERCURRENT IN BOTH SEGEV AND HARIF PIECES IS THAT US WHILE FIRMLY BEHIND ISRAEL IS NOT AS CONCERNED ABOUT MIDDLE EAST AS IT USED TO BE. EMBASSY WOULD NOT RULE OUT POSSIBILITY THAT THIS NOTION IS GAINING GROUND AMONG MANY IN ISRAEL AND THAT ISRAELIS, EVEN THE MANY WHO AT FIRST BLUSH ARE DELIGHTED AT LOWER US POSTURE, MAY ALSO HAVE VAGUE MISGIVINGS THAT APPARENT ABSENCE OF INTENSIVE, CONTINUING US SEARCH FOR SLIGHTEST CRACK IN MID EAST DEADLOCK MAY NOT IN LONG RUN BE SUCH A GOOD THING FOR ISRAEL.

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